



MEDIA RELEASE



U.S. Africa Command

COMBINED JOINT TASK FORCE-HORN OF AFRICA

Speech by Brigadier General Scott F. Smith 20th AMISOM Battalion ACOTA Graduation Ceremony March 8, 2013

It is with great pleasure that I stand here, representing General Ham, the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, and Major General Baker, the Commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, at today's graduation of the 20th Burundi battalion to support the African Union Mission in Somalia.

To the members of the battalion – I salute you. Each of you has endured rigorous training over the past ten weeks, training that will serve you well in your deployment to Somalia. Your accomplishments and dedication to the mission are commendable. Since 2007, Burundi has committed 20 battalions to the mission in Somalia, which demonstrates clearly how much you value the sovereignty of that nation and the importance of assisting neighbors in defending themselves from transnational threats.

The success we have seen in Somalia is illustrative of the strong relationships we share and value. The relationships you have with your fellow soldiers, with your AMISOM partners – as allies with a shared objective – and the relationships you have with us – CJTF-HOA, the U.S. military, and the broader U.S. government – these are the key to our continued success. We look forward to strengthening our partnership and supporting you, your country, and the AMISOM effort in Somalia as you seek to bring security, stability, and prosperity to East Africa.

Yours is an important mission, and your contribution is critical. The eyes of the world look to East Africa and see many nations joining together to ensure a neighbor nation has support to regain its sovereignty and achieve peace and opportunity for its people. This is a noble undertaking, and I know you are proud to help make history.

I would also like to extend my appreciation and, thanks to the ACOTA trainers and military mentors here today, and, in particular, highlight the efforts of James Cobb, the ACOTA country program manager. The impressive training curriculum would not be possible without the valuable operational experience you provide. Your efforts help ensure the Burundians are more effective as they deploy in support of AMISOM.

As the Ambassador conveyed, we fully encourage Burundi's goal to develop the capability to train future peacekeeping soldiers and we look forward to supporting them in this endeavor. May our security partnership continue to strengthen in the years ahead.

Thank you again for inviting me to attend this event. I am honored to celebrate this day with you all.